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A D D R E S S

DELIVERED AT THE CEREMONY OF

LAYING THE CORNER-STONE

OF THE

New York State Institution for the Blind,

AT BATAVIA,

SEPTEMBER 6, 1866.

BY

SAMUEL G. HOWE.

B O S T O N :

WALKER, FULLER & COMPANY.

1866.

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## A D D R E S S .

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*My Friends and Fellow-Citizens:—*

The ceremony which brings us together is an uncommon one, and it suggests an uncommon train of thought.

Those in whose behalf an institution is to be established here, are blind; and we are naturally led to consider how the infirmity of blindness affects the mental condition, and the moral and social relations of men.

That which distinguishes humanity—which lifts man above all created earthly beings, and to a rank a little lower than the angels, is the mind, or soul, with its powers of outlook and self-inspection. But mind, or soul, or spirit—call it as we may—would be powerless and worthless in this state of being without language.

Language is to the mind more even than the right hand is to the body. Without language, we can have no knowledge of each other, save such as the brutes have; no society except gregariousness; no affections, save those growing out of animal instinct. If language were abolished, and men

made dumb, the course of civilization would not only be arrested, but rolled backward; and, in a few generations, there would remain only tribes of wild men, battling among the ruins of cities and villages, with each other and with the brutes, for mere animal existence.

Language is not the mere servant of the mind, the vehicle of thought, but it is the instrument of our moral emotions, of our social affections; of all friendship, of all love. That love which is awakened through the sight, passes away with the decay of the beauty which is seen. But the love which is awakened by spiritual intercourse, lasts not only while life lasts, but survives the death of the loved object; and endures while memory endures.

Language, then, is the bond of union, of affection, and of interest, among individual men and women,—for their intercourse is mainly by speech, audible or written.

But language is of vast extent, and speech is only one of its powers. By speech and by print, men of our generation hold intercourse with each other. There are, moreover, some sorts of language by which the generations of men hold intercourse with other generations, and by which they converse across centuries and cycles of time. Among the various forms of language between the generations, and between the ages, monuments hold a high place.

As men and women unwittingly, and sometimes unwillingly, reveal their character, and even their secret motives of action, by the sort of language which they use, so the generations unwittingly

reveal the prevailing ideas of the men who lived in them, by the works which they leave behind them. Consider the Pyramids of Egypt, and read the speech which they utter. Study not their hieroglyphics, nor believe their inscriptions, for the phrase "to lie like a tombstone," was probably as good in the great Necropolis of Egypt as it is in a modern graveyard; but consider what the huge structures themselves tell us of the generations which built them! What say the ten million cubic feet of solid masonry, enclosing two or three small chambers, whose entrances are so narrow that the enclosed sarcophagus must have been placed therein before the walls were built; and those entrances afterwards closed up by huge blocks of stone, too heavy to be moved by any common force? What does all this tell? What is the language of that generation, spoken by the tongue of the pyramids to this generation?

It is, that the monarchs were absolute, selfish, cruel and short-sighted. That they built these vast monuments to preserve their fame from oblivion, and their bodies from disturbance. Vain hope! Their very names are forgotten, and

"Not a pinch of dust remains of Cheops!"

The monuments tell us, moreover, that the people must have been ignorant, oppressed, and like "dumb, driven cattle."

They tell us, that great multitudes of men and women were driven in from towns and villages, to toil and moil, and lift stones and carry sand for weeks and months; and when some had died and

all were exhausted, then that fresh gangs were driven in to take their places.

And so of smaller monuments, whether the triumphal arch, where the chained captive walks sadly behind the sculptured conquerors; or the storied column, with its winding procession of battles, assaults and sieges, leading up to the proud victor standing self-glorified on the top.

And so of those which tell a better story—the aqueducts, the fountains, the bridges, the canals, the docks and the like. If we study the monuments which a generation built, and the kind of men in whose honor they raised statues, we may learn much of the character of the people themselves.

You are assembled to lay the foundations of a monument which will speak to future generations; and although what you grave upon the corner-stone, and what you put within it, should never be seen, the monument itself will talk to future generations; and what will it tell them?

It will disclose that the physical condition of the human race in this country was imperfect and unfavorable, and that there were born to this generation, and expected to be born in the next, sightless children, numerous enough to form a persistent class. That children of this class were not only loved and cherished by their parents and kindred, but also cared for by the public. That there was no Mount Taygetus here, on which to expose them, with other infirm folk, to perish or be devoured, but asylums into which they were gathered and nurtured.

It will prove that the social and political union which here leagued three million people into one powerful State, was formed and maintained not only for defence against enemies, for common commercial interests, for great enterprises, for social prosperity and enjoyment, nor yet for mental culture and high civilization of the many, but also for the protection and care of the weak and infirm. That the State of New York, which could dig out a navigable river clear across her broad land,—which had just armed and sent forth three hundred thousand sturdy soldiers to serve the common country and the cause of humanity,—that this great State, while holding on in her high career of material prosperity, and providing schools for all the children, took thought also that not even the sightless little ones should be neglected.

In such language will the building, whose foundation-stone you this day lay, speak to many generations in coming time.

But while thus noting with pleasure and even excusable pride, the humane impulses which prompt and which will carry forward the work, pardon me if I utter a word of warning.

Good intentions, and kind impulses, do not necessarily lead to wise and truly humane measures.

Nowhere is wisdom more necessary than in the guidance of charitable impulses. Meaning well is only half our duty; thinking right is the other and equally important half.

Every one of you has probably learned by experience, that he may by alms or unwise aid

increase the very suffering which he sought to relieve.

How many times have you given for the mere luxury of giving? It is not only more blessed to give than to receive, but also more pleasant. Take an extreme case, and consider how many children are positively harmed by having too much done for them; and especially by having gifts showered too profusely upon them.

No people are more eager and successful than ours in pursuit of gain; but none so profuse in scattering it. We have a passion for giving gifts, especially to children. This passion waxes strong at particular seasons, the return of which is calculated upon by the cunning urchins, as the farmer calculates upon the early and the latter rain.

They consult the almanac which says of holidays, Look out for presents in drops; of birthdays, for abundance of gifts; and once in the year for the great hail storm lasting from Christmas to New Year. Parents, then, as if half ashamed of their weakness, resort to the pleasant myth of Santa Claus, who pelts the eager urchins with all sorts of missiles, from sugar plums up to images of every sort of beast and bird that came out of Noah's ark; and many beside whose strange appearance would excite wonder and admiration in any modern museum or menagerie; for they are unlike anything in the heaven above, on the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth.

The wit of men and women is then taxed to invent new toys, and new ornaments; and many arts and trades are plied diligently for months before the

holidays, to supply the demand for gifts. Mean-time children are all on tip-toe of hope and expectation; and as the time approaches they can hardly think by day of anything but presents, or sleep at night without dreaming that Santa Claus is at hand. And when the day arrives, what multitude and what variety of gifts, from father, mother, brother, sister, aunt, uncle and cousin—by blood and by marriage to the third and fourth degree. Those who have wide family relations get presents enough to stock a small shop, and set up in trade.

Christmas to such children is not the day when the most inspired Son of God was born into the world to reveal his Father's love, and develop the divine capacity inherent in his human brethren, but the day when Santa Claus comes down the chimney to bring a new dispensation of toys and sugar plums.

To older children it is a day for receiving choicer gifts, of greater value every year.

Thus to the young the blessed anniversary is stripped of its most endearing associations and clad with others unfavorable in their nature. Love and affection do indeed crave to speak in language of tokens and gifts; and there is so much that is beautiful even in our Christmas festival, that rather than lose it, we would cling to all the extravagances, all the pranks and humors, and hold Santa Claus among our household gods. But may we not retain all that is graceful and good without the evil?

Be that as it may, I mention Christmas not to detract from its merits, but only to illustrate my meaning in speaking of gifts and undue attentions to blind children. To those born of wealthy parents, Santa Claus instead of a yearly visitor is a common carrier; and the class generally suffer rather from excess of sympathy than from lack of it; more from what is done for them, than from what is left undone; more from attentions than from neglect.

Better a bruise or a bump than not make their own way about. If an ordinary child falls over an object, you cry "Jump up and try another!" You should cry that to the blind. But no; those dear children must learn no hard lesson through suffering. Every obstacle must be removed from their way, which must be carpeted with velvet; and they must be cautioned against danger, instead of being encouraged to meet it. They are helped to do what they should learn to do alone; kept at home when they should be urged abroad; seated in the rocking-chair when they should be tumbling about house and grounds; helped and waited upon when they should be held to help and wait upon their elders; spared when they should be urged; enervated where they should be hardened, and often demoralized by the habit of receiving as gifts what they should earn by hard effort, or resolutely forego.

For one blind child who is properly trained to consider the dangers, difficulties, and obstacles arising from his condition, as things to be met and overcome, by sharpened senses, by hard study, or

hard effort, by muscular strength and activity, by courage and presence of mind, by self-confidence and resolution—for one trained up in this spirit, a score are enervated and emasculated for life by excess of sympathy and unwise help during childhood.

It frequently happens that parents refuse to send a blind child to school or to an Institution until the best years for study are passed, simply from excess of affection and anxiety for its safety. The other children may wander abroad to gather courage and strength from facing dangers and overcoming difficulties; but this dear pet, who has the sorest need of all to be trained to hardy self-reliance; who should become strong in limb, and supple in joint; who should be a good gymnast, and climb, and jump, and lift weights, and swim and row; who should saw and pile wood, and feed cattle, and be put to every possible kind of work about the house and farm, that he may become healthy in body and resolute in purpose, the better to face and travel his stony road,—he must be wrapped in flannel, and kept in the rocking chair, to grow up pale and flabby, and awkward, and timid, because his mother “loved him, not wisely but too well.”

As it is with individuals, so it is with communities; because society moved by pity for some special form of suffering, hastens to build up establishments which sometimes increase the very evil which it wishes to lessen.

There are several such already in this country; and unless we take heed there will be many more.

Our people have rather a passion for public institutions, and when their attention is attracted to any suffering class, they make haste to organize one for its benefit.

But instead of first carefully inquiring whether an institution is absolutely necessary, that is whether there is no more natural and effectual manner of relieving the class; and afterwards, taking care that no vicious principle be incorporated into the establishment; they hastily build a great showy building, and gather within its walls a crowd of person of like condition or infirmity; and organize a community where everything goes by clock-work and steam. If there be a vicious principle in the organization, as of closely associating persons who ought to live apart, it is forgotten in admiration of contrivances for making steam do what once was done by the good housewife, with her cook and maid; and of the big bright coppers, the garish walls, and the white floors.

But no steam power, nor human power can long keep a vicious principle from cropping out. It has done so in many European institutions of charity; it will do so in many of ours.

Let me cite one in Rome, a city boastful of the number and extent of its charitable institutions.

There stands, in one of the retired streets, dimly lighted by night, the great Foundling Hospital, as it is called. Though really it is a sort of free nursery.

In the outer wall there is a niche sheltered from the weather. At the back of the niche is a small door opening into the hospital. Then there is a

crane which swings out and in, and to this crane is attached a nice warm cradle, near by which hangs a bell. When a woman wishes to get rid of her infant, she goes by night and lays it in the cradle, pulls the bell and runs away. Or if she fears to make any signal, she is sure that when the babe awakes and cries, it will arouse the watch; that the cradle will be swung into the wall, and her abandoned little one be fed, and clad, and cared for.

The impulse which prompted such an institution, and such a practice, was beautiful and good. Some kind heart had been moved by hearing of little innocents left to suffer cold and hunger in the open streets, and pity rather than wisdom prompted the building of a foundling hospital. But it is more than probable, that for one child saved from death, a score are abandoned by mothers who would have taken care of them had they not be tempted by the facilities held out by the hospital, for getting rid of them with safety to the infants and to themselves. It thus tends to encourage vice, and to act as a premium upon crime.

No class has suffered so much from this lack of wisdom in the guidance of charitable emotions, as the blind have suffered, and do suffer. And this is easily understood. Of all bodily defects or infirmities, blindness is the one which *seems* the most dreadful. We feel and comprehend at once the severity of the privation; and we imagine that it entails a great deal more suffering and unhappiness than it really does. The sight of a blind man, and still more of a blind child, touches every heart, and appeals forcibly for sympathy and aid.

This sympathy and pity prompt us at once to some outward action; they are too strong for our control. We must *do something*, and not knowing well what to do,—not understanding what the sufferers really need—we put our hands in our pockets, and give money.

Thence it is that in all countries and all ages, before and since

“ Blind Bartimeus at the gate  
Of Jericho in darkness sate,”

the blind man has been considered as the object for alms-giving. The very thought of blindness, suggests a sightless man, standing by the way-side holding out his hat for alms.

So universal is this, that blindness and begging seem to some as synonymous.

Indeed, after police regulations become established, and vagrancy is punished, and begging is forbidden, and the streets are cleared of mendicants; still the blind man keeps his old stand at the corner, and holds out his hat. No policeman is so hard-hearted as to disturb him; and he is allowed by general consent to remain at his post, where he often gathers more money than the laborers can earn by their work.

In Italy they make every bridge a “Bridge of Sighs;” they stand at the city gates, and at the street crossings; or sit in their reserved seats on the steps of churches; and detecting with quick ear every approaching footstep, raise a plaintive clamor, which is changed to blessings if an alms is dropped, but sometimes to muttered curses if it is withheld.

Such is the general treatment which the blind as a class have received from the public in all countries. That treatment shows the existence of tender and charitable feelings the world over. But it shows, also, that those feelings, if unguided by reason, may do as much harm as good, if not more. With all their pity and their sympathy, people have failed to give the blind man what he most needs, and have unwittingly put obstacles in the way of his ever getting it.

Nor have governments been much wiser. Some of the old establishments for the blind are merely asylums, which have become centres of idleness and vice. The larger they are the worse they become. Witness the great Lazar House for the blind at Naples; and the "Quinze Vingt's" or Asylum for fifteen score of blind men at Paris. The lives led there are not a whit better than that of the spectacled blind musicians in the *Caffé des Aveugles*, whose deplorable condition attracted the attention of the Abbe Haüy, and led to the formation of the first school for the blind.

Even the modern institutions of Europe and America, greatly superior as they are, in most respects, to the old ones, and admirable as most of them are, still savor too much of being merely *charitable*. They are organized too much like almshouses; and administered in such wise as to tend strongly to the formation of life asylums, disguised under other names.

One of the present difficulties is to correct the prevailing notion about the real condition and wants of the blind. People suppose that blindness implies

not only dependence but unhappiness. That the blind are necessarily helpless, and therefore must always have direct aid if not support; and that even if educated they must still be objects of charity. Probably the popular notion about the institution whose corner-stone you to-day lay is, that of an asylum for blind children, in which they may remain for life.

Let me strive to correct some of these notions; and to explain the nature and effects of the infirmity of blindness.

I said, it *seems* to be the most dreadful one to which men are liable; but it only *seems* so to those who do not reflect.

Sore as is the affliction, there are sorer ones, which men can and do bear patiently, and even cheerfully. Should I ask whether you would rather be blind or deaf, most would exclaim, O, deaf, by all means. And so once should I have done; but not now. On the contrary, I hold that, to a person not obliged to struggle hard for a livelihood, blindness would be a lighter calamity than deafness, — I mean congenital blindness.

Nay, even with the superior advantage for manual work which a deaf mute has, I should prefer that a child of mine be blind rather than deaf.

This may seem strange; but call to mind the blind persons and the deaf persons whom you have known, and I think you will find that most of the former have been not only resigned, but social and cheerful, while the latter are, for the most part, unsocial and unhappy.

Light is beautiful; but is darkness dreadful? None of you can see in the dark; but do you expect to be unhappy to-night, even though kerosene and candles fail?

A great poet, relating his horrid dream of universal darkness, when

“ —— the bright sun was extinguished,  
And the stars did wander through the eternal space  
Rayless and pathless; and the icy earth  
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air,”

shows that all the dreadful effects came not from lack of light, but lack of heat; and that upon the brow of the last man, not darkness, but “famine, had written, fiend!”

But the darkness of which we are thinking implies no lack of warmth, and it affects not society. Our dream is of the effect upon ourselves alone, all others being in the bright sunlight.

Imagine yourselves, then, sitting at twilight with your children, your family, and your friends gathered about you; and the light fading until you cannot see each others' faces. You are then blind, but are you unhappy until the candles are lighted? On the contrary, do you not sit and enjoy each others' society, and talk, and laugh, as much as before.

But suppose you are all struck dumb, even before the light fades away, and you can have no more free exchange of thought, no more words of endearment and affection, no more stories and jokes, no more laughter and song, but instead thereof a dread stillness, which not even a cannon nor a thunder-clap could break; where, then, is your society?

Again, imagine a man possessed of all the comforts and refinements of outward life; with a cultivated mind and literary tastes; with a warm heart and pure affections; and who is blessed with deserving objects of his love; suppose such a man to be making merry with his relations and friends, and playing blind-man's buff with his children;—while he is blindfolded is he not as merry as ever? Does he not love the little ones whom he catches in his arms as well as though he could see them?

Now, suppose that he should find he could not remove the bandage for a day, a week, or a year. He would then be, for the time, a blind man. But in what would he have changed? What would he have lost? What great source of happiness would have been dried up in his bosom?

He soon learns to go about his house alone, and about the neighborhood, with a guide. He finds that he can attend to any ordinary business, if he chooses to do so. The world and its affairs, his friends and their welfare, have lost none of their interest for him. His home becomes doubly dear to him, and there he finds sources of pleasure which increase as they are drawn upon. In his library he finds no essential change, because poetry, philosophy and history lose no charms by being borne to his mind on the voice of affection; and custom soon gives to the habit of dictating all the pleasure there was in writing. Conversation, by which we learn more and improve more than by any and all modes of communing with other minds, becomes to him the means of new pleasure and profit.

But it is mostly in the greater development of his affections, and the exercise of them, that he finds compensations which he could not have hoped for. His home is not long dark because the rays of the sun are shut out, but, like the fabled cavern, it glows with the light of the gems which adorn it. The love and loyalty of his wife, the affection of his children, the tender regard and tried fidelity of his friends,—these jewels of the heart shine brighter for the darkness around him, and he feels that he would not lose one of them, even to recover his lost sight.

Indulgence in the exercise of disinterested affections and of love, is the only harmless intemperance; and the blind man intoxicates himself therewith by daily draughts.

This is not mere theory; experience shows that persons who become blind often grow more amiable, contented, and even cheerful than before.

There are exceptions of course, and it is unfortunate that Milton should have been one of them,—because his eminence as a poet and scholar makes his example conspicuous; and his words to be taken as the natural language of a class of unfortunates.

But Milton, austere and melancholy by temperament, saddened by blight of his generous and patriotic hopes, and embittered by his domestic troubles, was already under the cloud before darkness closed around him; and he would, doubtless, have sang sadly the rest of his life, had he not "sang darkly."

At any rate, he did not bear his misfortune as bravely as some have done. He should not, in this respect, be held up as an exemplar for the blind;

nor should his plaintive utterances, musical as they are, be quoted as depicting faithfully their mental condition.

There have been other blind men more admirable in this respect, for they set forth in their lives and conversation the sublime moral height to which men may attain by grappling courageously the nettle misfortune, and "plucking thence the flower," happiness.

If it were a simple question between the sacrifice of sight or hearing, no one who duly weighs their comparative value to his higher nature, and their importance as ministers of the mind and soul, would hesitate about which would be the greatest loss to him. He who prefers the body and its pleasures—the outer world and its beauties—would choose deafness; but he who prefers the mind and its culture, the affections and their enjoyment, would choose blindness. This preference of hearing, however, would be given only by persons of a certain mental culture, and, [in the present state of society,] of moderate competence; because, to the man obliged to labor for a livelihood, especially if others are dependent upon him, blindness becomes a more serious calamity.

The eye ministers most to the body, its wants, and its pleasures; the ear to the mind, its capacities and its affections. The choice which would be made between them, were one forced to the dreadful alternative of the loss of either, would be in some measure a test of the extent to which the spirit of Christianity had pervaded the community in which he lives.

If society practically recognizes the right of every one to a share of labor and of its profits; if its spirit is that of human brotherhood; of mutual co-operation, aid and assistance,—then a man would choose the lesser evil,—that which affects mostly the body, and impairs not the higher nature; he would prefer to be blind. If, on the contrary, the spirit of the society in which he lives is that of selfish competition and antagonism; if the man has himself and his family to support, and if he must stand or fall solely by his own strength or weakness,—if brotherhood means only kith and kin,—then he might accept the other evil, for that would apparently leave a better chance of earning his living.

But if you look a little closer into the matter, you will see good reason for considering blindness less dreadful than deafness—especially for children who are yet to get their education—that is, to have their mind and character developed. For all sensuous relations; for all outward, material, and mechanical purposes, sight is of the first importance; but for all mental, moral, and spiritual relations, the hearing is the queen of the senses. And this is because the one indispensable instrument for mental development is *speech*. Not language, in its general sense, which comprehends signs and pantomime, and which may be mastered by deaf mutes, but speech proper, which no deaf mute can ever acquire in any high degree of perfection. It is this which gives to the blind child such an immense advantage over the deaf child. He can be educated

just as we were educated,—just as the boys and girls who are growing up around him are educated.

Bear with me if I go a little into the dry philosophy of this subject.

Education is carried on mainly by means of language; but by all sorts of language, looks, gestures, actions and the like; while *instruction* is given chiefly through one sort of language,—speech,—that is, audible sounds, or spoken words, which are arbitrary signs of thought; and written words, which are arbitrary signs of audible sounds. Children therefore, in order to be instructed, must first learn these arbitrary audible sounds, or words.

But although the sounds or the words, which we adopt as the signs of our thoughts, are purely arbitrary, and we select one to express our thought, for example of a fruit, and say *apple*, while a Frenchman selects another sound and says *pomme*, still, speech itself is not arbitrary, but natural; that is, man does not select audible sounds from among the possible modes of expressing his thoughts, and make that the base of his language, but that mode is the one special mode suggested by his very nature. Some writers on deaf-mute instruction seem to overlook this psychological difference, and suppose that a language of visible signs may be a perfect substitute for one of vocal sounds. Not so. Speech is not an accidental attribute of humanity, but an essential one. It inheres in man as man. It is not a human invention, it is a natural outgrowth. Men speak because they cannot help it. There is indeed a natural disposition to attach some supplementary signs to thought, as movement of feature and limb, or panto-

mime; and these prevail among tribes and nations whose language is limited, but these are only adjuncts. Speech is the natural, therefore the best mode of expressing human thought; nay! it is the only one by which there can be full freedom for the development of the intellectual and moral nature. Audible speech is immeasurably superior to any other mode of expression, as an instrument of human education and of instruction. No language of visible signs can ever approach in thoroughness and excellence, the language of audible words. As people advance in civilization they improve this language, and come to rely upon it entirely. They reject the adjuncts—the visible signs; they do not need to eke out their meaning by gestures; and they come to express every possible condition of things, and every phase of thought by a system of vocal sounds, which becomes their vernacular. Each generation of children catches the sounds or words, and almost without effort learns the language of the country; good, bad, or indifferent,—*oaths and all*.

But, in every generation there are a certain number, who, being born deaf, do not hear these sounds; and therefore cannot imitate them. They have, however, the common human disposition and desire to express emotion and thought by some outward signs; and the natural tendency to use vocal speech as the readiest sign, prompts them to attempt vocal utterance. As however, they cannot *hear* the words which they utter, they fail to make them uniform, and intelligible to others. They cannot modulate the voice and speak distinctly; and after painful efforts they give up in despair and remain dumb.

Still, the desire to express feelings and thoughts by signs and so to commune with others, remains strong within them; and though they give up attempts to use the highest forms of language, they persist in the use of the lower form of visible signs.

They perceive that persons who speak do not confine themselves to making audible sounds, but use certain adjuncts of speech or interpretations of emotions, such as expressions of face and feature, gestures, and signs of various kinds. These are usually called natural signs, or natural language, though strictly speaking they are no more natural than are audible sounds. But these are the only parts of language which deaf children can seize upon, and they come to rely upon them alone.

They watch eagerly the play of the features, the expression of the countenance, and the gestures of the speaker, and imitate them. They invent other signs of their own, they multiply them, they *emphasize* them by earnest looks, and by eager gestures; and so form a language, which however is only rudimentary and imperfect. But besides its imperfections, this language cannot become common even among mutes; because no two adopt the same signs.

There is a certain resemblance, indeed, because they do for the most part seize upon some supposed analogy, and make a sign resembling the thing thought of: as whirling the hand for the motion of a wheel. This answers to a certain extent for things in the concrete; but when it comes to abstract matters they are lost. One selects one sign, another another; and of course they cannot form a common language. But this is not the worst of it. Men may

doubtless have cognizance of facts and phenomena; as fire and ice and recall them to memory without attaching names thereto. But it is hardly conceivable that they should go farther, and form abstract ideas as of heat and cold, without names. Definite thought suggests a name, as substance causes shadow. At any rate, there can be no great mental development, and no high culture, without signs, and even very definite signs, for the thoughts; and there can be no precise, minute, and definite signs, except speech, oral or written. Indeed, they are necessary for the simple process of recollection; because the ideas which we have formed from impressions upon the senses, if without signs attached to them, would be like a pile of books without labels or title pages. Language is to thought, what the trellis is to the vine.

This it is which gives to the blind child such measureless advantage over the deaf child in acquiring knowledge. The first at eight years old comes to school fully armed with the great instruments of thought and study. You need waste no time in establishing means of communication between your mind and his; but the mute cannot understand a single word that you say. He has indeed a certain rude language of signs and gestures, to make known certain emotions and desires; but he has no sign for a *word*, and therefore no means of expressing definite thought.

You must teach him, by a slow and tedious process, that besides the sign which he has adopted for a horse, or a house, there is another visible sign; and you *draw* a house or a horse upon a blackboard.

This sign is founded on the likeness between the house or horse, and the picture of it. This you would do with any deaf-mute child, of whatever country; and all would understand it. Then you go farther, and make certain arbitrary marks, which to him are new and strange. Under the picture of the animal, you make five marks, which you call letters — *h-o-r-s-e*; then under the picture of the building you make other five — *h-o-u-s-e*. You have then to repeat the process over and over again, until the sight of those letters, arranged in that particular order, suggests to him the idea of the thing which you have in your mind.

I do not mean to say that this is the approved method used in the schools for mutes, but one which any person, not an expert, might adopt.

Let me illustrate this by the method which I devised to teach letters to Laura Bridgman, who was not only quite deaf, but quite blind, and almost devoid of the sense of smell, which is usually much relied upon by persons in her sad condition. I began with single short words, as pin and pen. I took some embossed letters, such as the blind use, and placing three of them, p-e-n, on the table beside a pen, made her feel them over and over again, until they became associated in her mind with the pen. Then I introduced a fourth letter, i, and put together p-i-n, and placed these beside a pin. These were felt of over and over and over again, until the three signs, placed in that order, became associated with a pin; so that when she felt them so placed on the page of a book, the thought of a pin came up in her mind. And so on, intro-

ducing new letters, placing them in new combinations. Slowly and gradually she went on, mastering new signs or letters until she had learned twenty-six, when she began to perceive that there were no more new ones, but only new combinations of the familiar ones. Then I took a label, as s-p-o-o-n, and pasted it on a spoon, and made her feel them over again and again and again; and so with other things. You see that as soon as she got hold of the thread, as soon as she found that by putting together certain letters in certain combinations, she could make me understand what things she had in her mind, and as soon as she had learned twenty-six of these, she was mistress of the alphabet, or elements of arbitrary language, and had only to go on and learn to spell the names of all the things she could reach. This she was so eager to do, that thenceforward one could not satisfy her.

But these bits of embossed paper were most inconvenient and unsatisfactory; and so I began by doubling one fist and putting my fingers in a certain position, and placing the hand so closed beside the letter p, and repeating it so often that she associated in her mind that position of fingers with the letter p. Then I took the same course with another letter which she had learned; and so on through twenty-six letters, irrespective of their alphabetical order, until she came to understand that by a certain position of the fingers she would make three signs, p-i-n, which would signify a pin, just as did the three bits of embossed paper. Thus she was equipped with a better instrument of inter-

course; a swifter telegraph from her mind out to ours, which was always at her fingers' end.

This is said in a few minutes; but the process was so slow, so long-protracted, that it would have been wearisome indeed but for the object in view, which was to lead her out of her inward darkness into our blessed light.

It is easy to show the process by which she learned nouns, or names of all sensible objects, but it would take me too long to show the process by which she passed to a knowledge of words expressing relations, and of qualities.

The first step of the transition is easy; for you perceive that there are certain qualities which she could understand, as sweetness in an apple, and by analogy sweetness in temper. She did finally master the names of qualities, and of purely abstract ideas, so that she could read and write and converse, and thus became an intelligent, responsible moral agent, and a happy and useful member of human society, loving many, and beloved of many.

The thing which prompted me to aid her in her first efforts to get out of her dark and silent isolation, and which made me sure of success in my simple method, was the conviction that, though hardly having more intelligence than a dog, she showed the common human desire and capacity to associate names with things, and thoughts of things. She took hold of the thread by which I would lead her out, because she had all the special attributes of a human soul.

No created being devoid of these attributes could do it. Try ye, who believe that an ape or a chim-

panzee differs only a degree from man! and though the pupil may have the aid of fine sharp senses, and the help of an academy of philosophers, not even the threshold will be passed; while this child who could not see even a flash of lightning, or hear a crash of thunder,—who had, indeed, but one perfect sense,—went on by aid of that alone until she acquired language; could converse freely and rapidly; could read embossed books and write legible letters; and finally came into sympathetic and affectionate relations with her family and friends; and felt that even her poor life was a precious boon for which she was grateful to its Great Giver, whom she learned to know as her God and Father.

This was very long ago, and I may not have related, in this hasty sketch, the exact order of the different stages of instruction. But you will allow me to quote from an account which I printed concerning the application of this method to another child, a boy of twelve, blind and deaf and dumb. The record states that before entering school,—

“He was fond of teasing cats, and generally inclined to fun. He could make many of his wants understood by signs. He was, however, ungovernable, and when thwarted in any way, he became very violent, braying, striking and kicking furiously.

“His signs were expressive, and the strictly natural language, laughing, crying, sighing, kissing, embracing, etc., was perfect. Some of the analogical signs which (guided by his faculty of imitation,) he had contrived, were comprehensible, such as the waving motion of his hand for the motion of a boat, the circular one for a wheel, etc. The first object was to break up the use of these signs, and to substitute therefor the use of purely arbitrary ones.

"Profiting by the experience I had gained in the other cases, I omitted several steps of the process before employed, and commenced at once with the finger language. Taking, therefore, several articles having short names, such as key, cup, mug, &c., and with Laura for an auxiliary, I sat down, and taking his hand, placed it upon one of them, and then with my own made the letters, k-e-y. He felt eagerly of my hands with both of his, and on my repeating the process, he evidently tried to imitate the motions of my fingers. In a few minutes he contrived to feel the motions of my fingers with one hand, and holding out the other, he tried to imitate them, laughing most heartily when he succeeded. Laura was by, interested even to agitation, and the two presented a singular sight; her face was flushed and anxious, and her fingers twined in among ours so closely as to follow every motion, but so lightly as not to embarrass them; while Oliver stood attentive, his head a little aside, his face turned up, his left hand grasping mine, and his right held out; at every motion of my fingers his countenance betokened keen attention. There was an expression of anxiety as he tried to imitate the motions—then a smile came stealing out as he thought he could do so, and spread into a joyous laugh the moment he succeeded, and felt me pat his head, and Laura clap him heartily upon the back, and jump up and down in her joy.

"He learned more than a half dozen letters in half an hour, and seemed delighted with his success, at least in gaining approbation. His attention then began to flag, and I commenced playing with him. It was evident that in all this he had merely been imitating the motions of my fingers, and placing his hand upon the key, cup, &c., as part of the process, without any perception of the relation between the sign and the object.

"When he was tired with play I took him back to the table, and he was quite ready to begin again his process of imitation. He soon learned to make the letters for *key*, *pen*, *pin*; and by having the object repeatedly placed in his hand, he at last perceived the relation I wished to establish between

them. This was evident, because when I made the letters, p-i-n, or p-e-n, or c-u-p, he would select the article.

“The perception of this relation was not accompanied by that radiant flash of intelligence and that glow of joy which marked the delightful moment when Laura first perceived it. I then placed all the articles on the table, and going away a little distance with the children, placed Oliver’s fingers in the positions to spell key, on which Laura went and brought the article; the little fellow seemed to be much amused at this, and looked very attentive and smiling. I then caused him to make the letters, b-r-e-a-d, and in an instant Laura went and brought him a piece; he smelled at it, put it to his lips, cocked up his head with a most knowing look, seemed to reflect a moment, and then laughed outright, as much as to say—‘Aha! I understand now how something may be made out of this!’”

But, to return to the mute who is simply deaf. He has, of course, great advantage over poor Laura; but you can see how slow and tedious even with him, this process must be; unless, however, you have some experience in such work, you cannot understand fully its difficulties and imperfection.

In this slow and hard work the deaf-mute child must spend months and years. At the end of five to eight years, when he is fifteen or sixteen years old, he gets in respect to a knowledge of language about where your ordinary children, and even blind children were, at six or seven years old. With the blind child you need not waste a day in teaching language, that is, in giving him command of the instrument of thought, or in providing him with tools for work, while with the poor mute that task must occupy most of your time and efforts.

An eminent teacher of deaf-mutes, Rev. Collins Stone, Principal of the Hartford Asylum, says: "The effort upon which our labor is chiefly expended in the education of the deaf and dumb, is to teach them to use the English language with ease and accuracy. The deaf-mute is shut up to his sad heritage of ignorance and darkness, simply because his peculiar misfortune deprives him of all knowledge of written or spoken language." "It leaves him without a medium of communication with others, and seals up from his use the treasures of wisdom contained in books. To teach him the language of the community in which he lives is indispensably necessary, if we would bring him material relief, or break the power of the spell that weighs him down."

But after all; after the mute has spent most of his youth in learning our language, he succeeds very imperfectly, and he goes through life without mastering it thoroughly. Many of you, doubtless, are acquainted with some educated mute, and have, probably, tried to converse with him, either by the finger language or by writing, and you know how very unsatisfactory it is, and how limited is his knowledge of our language. Only the most expert of them can seize upon its nicest parts; and its delicate shades escape them altogether. For instance, they cannot enjoy a pun, or what we call play upon words; and much of the charm of style, and the beauty of poetry, are lost to them.

No deaf-mute becomes a learned man, that is, one who would be considered learned among scholars. Blindness sets no such limits to the range of culture

and of scholarship. Men born blind have become eminent as scholars, as poets, as linguists, lecturers, preachers, and even as philosophers; to say nothing of music, in which some have been brilliant composers. The successor of Sir Isaac Newton, in the university chair of philosophy, was a blind man, and lectured with ability and success upon mathematics.

Thus the darkness in which the blind dwell does not prevent them from attaining the highest forms of language, and the fullest development of the social and moral nature; but the silence in which the mutes dwell does prevent them. They, alas! cannot have through childhood, and youth, manhood, and age, that free, constant and intimate social intercourse, which is necessary for the highest development, simply because the chief instrument of human intercourse is language, and that not in its lowest form, but in the highest and most perfect form, or speech. Mutes cannot learn the wonderful language of society, and society will not stop to learn their imperfect one; consequently, they grow up more or less isolated. Now, isolation is stagnation, and complete isolation in youth would be fatal to human development and improvement. Indeed, our word *idiot*, you know, is derived from an old word signifying the purely individual *man*—devoid of human relationship.

Mutes may be rescued from entire isolation by the special and difficult instruction given them in our public institutions, which is indeed a noble and blessed work, for although it cannot counteract entirely the effects of their infirmity, it brings them

into near and dear relationship with society, by which they should be cherished as childlike and beloved members.

I have said nothing of the vast field of poetry and imagination which is opened to man by the study of music,

“Untwisting all the chains which tie  
The hidden soul of harmony,”

because I am unequal to the task. But you will easily see how many considerations, drawn from that source might be added to those which I have given, to show the great superiority of hearing over sight as a means of mental and spiritual growth.

Nor does hearing yield to sight the palm of supremacy even for all our relations with the material world. Life to be useful, must be safe. But we walk through the world surrounded with dangers of various kinds; and the warnings of these come mainly through the ear. This is, because during half of the time darkness prevails, and then the sentinel at the eye is off guard; but the one at the ear listens tireless during all the waking hours; and even when the body sleeps it is still half awake, for the ear shuts no lid as the eye does. Then, again, the eye receives no warning except when light strikes nearly from the front. Even with the eyes wide open, one-half the circle around us is unguarded; while the ear gathers in sound not only from all around but from above and below. Unless the rattlesnake be in the direct path, the eye sees him not; but the ear catches the first note of warning, come it from whence it

may. Then, again, the thinnest substance may arrest light; but sound traverses thick walls. Besides, sight is more voluntary; hearing more involuntary; indeed, it is almost automatic. You shut out sight easily, but exclude sound with difficulty. You may be blind at will; but you can hardly be deaf even by stopping the ears.

Such are some of the reasons for thinking that blindness is not so dreadful an infirmity, and does not entail such serious consequences as deafness; and to confirm them we have daily evidence that it does not cause so much unhappiness; indeed, that a great many sightless persons are social, cheerful and happy.

Still, the blind, as individuals and as a class, are sorely afflicted, and need the aid of their fellow-men; who are all ready to give it, and require only to know what is the best way.

To find that way requires thought and experience; and probably none of us have yet had enough of them. This much, however, is certain; the aid should not be given in alms, or in any way that savors of alms. Were it possible for government to pension every blind person for life, that would probably do more harm than good. We are safe in saying that as far as possible, they should be considered and treated just as ordinary persons, our equals and friends, are treated, and not singled out as special objects of pity. This is too often forgotten.

The time is past, with us at least, when blindness is considered as a special dispensation of Providence in punishment of a special sin; and yet not long

passed, for the Duke of York rudely asked Milton if he did not think he had lost sight as a punishment for writing his *Eikonoklastes*, and otherwise aiding rebellion against royalty; to which came the swift and fitting answer, "If so, your highness, how was it with your father, who lost all his senses and his head too?"

The blind will always want sympathy, and generally need aid; but they do not want to be segregated from ordinary society, nor to be considered as a class apart.

Common politeness, which is only kindness wisely directed, suggests, that in our intercourse with a blind man we should never needlessly allude to his infirmity, but treat him as if he had none. And common sense suggests that when we would help him, we should do it as we would help any other person; by putting him in the way of helping himself.

Now, as in the treatment of an individual blind man, so should it be with the treatment of the class. The State should admit the right of every child, whether native or foreign, black or white, sound or infirm, to the benefits of instruction at public expense. This is the wise policy of some of our States, where public provision is made for the gratuitous instruction of all children, by placing a free school-house within the reach of every family. As the logical consequences of this policy, if the mode of instruction in those free schools is such that any class of children, as the mutes, the blind, or the feeble-minded, cannot be taught by it, then special instruction is provided for each class;

and they are gathered into public institutions, and maintained as well as taught at public charge.

There are some seventeen institutions of this kind for the blind in the United States; and they are generally called charitable; but they ought not to be so considered any more than are the common schools. The parent ought perhaps in most cases to be called upon to pay as much toward the board of his child as it would cost him at home; but no more. The instruction, and the other advantages, are his due; for it is misfortune enough that his child is blind, without his being put to any more expense for schooling than his neighbors are for their children.

If you bear in mind what I said about the evil effects of alms, and of charitable gifts upon the blind, you will see the importance of insisting that blind children shall receive instruction from the State, not as a matter of charity, but as a matter of right.

I wish to make use of this opportunity for criticizing those institutions with a view to their improvement; and this my purpose must be my apology for alluding to the part which I have had in their establishment and organization. I not only organized the first one in the United States, the main features in the administration of which have been widely copied, but labored with more zeal than knowledge to induce people to found others; and made direct efforts to the legislatures of a dozen different States to appropriate money for their support.

I know them, therefore, from their foundation upward; and as their many merits have been freely pointed out to you, I will allude to some of their defects, that you may avoid them in your new establishment.

I accept my full share of condemnation when I say that grave errors were incorporated into the very organic principles of our institutions for the blind, which make them already too much like asylums; which threaten to cause real asylums to grow out of them, and to engender other evils. Let me set forth a little my idea of the general principles which should underlie all such establishments, and which have been too much neglected in the organization of many of our public institutions.

All great establishments in the nature of boarding schools, where the sexes must be separated; where there must be boarding in common, and sleeping in congregate dormitories; where there must be routine, and formality, and restraint, and repression of individuality; where the charms and refining influences of the true family relation cannot be had,—all such institutions are unnatural, undesirable, and very liable to abuse. We should have as few of them as is possible, and those few should be kept as small as possible.

The human family is the unit of society. The family, as it was ordained by our Great Father, with its ties of kith and kin; with its tender associations of childhood and youth; with its ties of affection and of sympathy; with its fireside, its table, and its domestic altar,—there is the place for the early education of the child. His instruction may be

had in school; his heart and character should be developed and moulded at home.

Artificial families have been tried and found wanting. Communities in imitation of the natural family, especially those confined to one sex, are fertile of evil. Witness the old nunneries and monasteries, darkened and saddened by lack of the sunlight of affection and love; embittered by petty passions and strife; soured by crushed hopes and yearnings; and defiled by unnatural vices. Witness soldiers in detached garrisons; sailors on long voyages; prisoners under long sentences. Wherever there must be separation of the sexes, isolation from society, absence of true family relation, and monotony of life, there must come evils of various kinds, which no watchfulness can prevent, and no physician can cure.

We should be cautious about establishing such artificial communities, or those approaching them in character, for any children and youth; but more especially should we avoid them for those who have any natural infirmity; or any marked peculiarity of mental organization.

Let me dwell upon this, for in my view, it is very important. Such persons spring up sporadically in the community, and they should be kept diffused among sound and normal persons. Separation, and not congregation, should be the law of their treatment; for out of their infirmity or abnormality there necessarily grow some abnormal and undesirable effects, and unless these be counteracted by education, they disturb the harmonious development of character. These effects are best coun-

teracted by bringing up the child among ordinary children, and subjecting him to ordinary social and family influences; but, on the contrary, they are intensified by constant and close association with children who are marked by the same infirmity or peculiarity.

This truth cannot be gainsaid; nor should the effects of it be disregarded because they seem so slight. As in physics, a force preponderating ever so slightly over other forces, is sure to prevail; so it is in morals. We should therefore keep this truth in mind; and give it due weight when forming plans for the treatment of any special class of persons.

As much as may be, surround insane and excitable persons with sane people, and ordinary influences; vicious children with virtuous people and virtuous influences; blind children with those who see; mute children with those who speak; and the like.

People run counter to this principle for the sake of economy in the expenses, and of some other good end, which they suppose cannot be had in any other way; as when they congregate the insane in hospitals, vicious children in reformatories, criminals in prisons, paupers in almshouses, orphan children in asylums, blind children and mute children in boarding schools. Hence I begin to consider such establishments as evils which must be borne with, for the time, in order to obviate greater evils. I would take heed, however, against multiplying them unnecessarily. I would keep them as small as I could. I would take the most stringent

measures for guarding against those undesirable effects which lessen their usefulness; and for finally dispensing with as many of them as may be possible.

But, besides this general objection to such establishments, there is another and more practical objection to the method of congregating for the purpose of education, any class of young persons marked by an infirmity like deafness or blindness. They depend more than ordinary persons do for their happiness and for their support upon the ties of kindred, of friendship, and of neighborhood. All these, therefore, ought to be nourished and strengthened during childhood and youth—for it is then, and then only, that they take such deep root as to become strong, and life-lasting. The home of the blind and of the mute should be his native town or village; there, if possible, he should live during childhood and youth; there he should form his friendships; there, if he comes to need special aid it will be given most readily and fitly; and there his old age will be most cherished. Beware how you needlessly sever any of those ties of family, of friendship, of neighborhood, *during the period of their strongest growth*, lest you make a homeless man, a wanderer and a stranger. Especially beware how you cause him to neglect forming early relations of affection with those whose sympathy and friendship will be most important to him during life, to wit, those who have all their senses; and how you restrict him to such relations with persons subject to an infirmity like his own.

I would observe, by the way, that the necessity now felt for a new institution in your State has arisen, partly at least, from radical faults in the organization of the old one, which necessarily led to faults in its administration, such as I have noticed. If the conditions of admission had been such as to exclude some who entered, but who ought not to have entered; if the term of residence had not been so long; if stringent measures had been taken to prevent the multiplication of graduates in and about the institution, and to encourage their dispersion and settlement in their several towns, instead of leaving them to congregate in the commercial capital, and to besiege the political capital; if these things had been done, the State would perhaps not now be called upon to incur the cost of building and the continual expense of carrying on a second institution.\*

But, it is settled that you are to have one, and, I trust, it will become worthy of the generous motives which prompt its creation; and of the great State which is to build it.

Take heed that it shall be organized on sound principles; and while copying all the good features of existing institutions, avoid those which are not good. Those establishments are all faulty. Not one of them is worthy to be your model in all respects; and the persons who flatter themselves that their favorite one is worthy to be copied exactly, are blind to faults which can be seen by looking beneath the surface. Never mind their showy buildings and special accommodations; you may as well mea-

\* See Note A.

sure the morality of a family by the structure and arrangement of its dwelling-house, as test institutions by their mechanical advantages; but look at the principles and system by which they are conducted. You will, then, find that they are faulty in many respects.

They are generally wrong in receiving pupils too indiscriminately; being, in most cases, tempted to do so by the fact that they are paid according to the number they receive. They are wrong in receiving all pupils as boarders, when they should receive those only who cannot board at home, or in private families. They are wrong in associating the blind too closely, and too many years together; thus loosening or breaking the ties of family and of neighborhood,—segregating them from society,—forming a class apart,—creating a feeling of caste,—and so intensifying all the unfavorable effects growing out of the infirmity of blindness. They necessarily encourage intermarriage of the blind; and thus increase the chances of infirm progeny. They attract the blind from the country, and congregate them in the cities. They are creating the necessity, or the demand, for permanent life asylums; all of which consummations are devoutly to be prayed against.

Instead, then, of copying the existing institutions, I think, that in organizing a new one something like the following rough plan should be adopted:—If the field were all clear, and no buildings provided, there should be built only a building for school-rooms, recitation rooms, music rooms and workshops; and *these should be in or near the centre of*

*a dense population.* For other purposes, ordinary houses would suffice. But your field is not clear. Your establishment is located, and your building is begun; the organization, however, is not completed.

And first as to your Superintendent. Let him be a man who has natural capacity enough for the enterprise. Give him ample power and abundant means, and then hold him to give strict account, and an abundant return of good. But respect his individuality; and let him do his work in his own way, and not in yours. Establish the principles, but leave details and methods of work to him. Give him full sailing directions, but let him be absolute captain of the ship.

You will thus avoid what has been one fertile source of difficulty in our public institutions.

In deciding upon who are to be received as pupils, you should first ascertain how many of the applicants are really blind, and then, instead of imitating the example of ordinary institutions, and getting as many into the school as possible, you should receive as few as possible; that is, you should reject every one who can be taught in common schools. And here, it should be remarked, that it is much easier to have children who are partially blind, and even those totally blind, received and taught in common schools than it was formerly, because the existence of Institutions for the Blind during the third of a century has familiarized people with the fact that sight is not essential for instruction in the common branches. A great many persons have become acquainted with the methods used in the Institu-

tions, and with the use of books in raised letters. I am constantly applied to by teachers to know how to proceed with a blind child; and I always encourage them to keep it at home, and let it go to the common school as long as possible.

But suppose that two hundred candidates present themselves for your Institution; out of these it will be found that from ten to twenty per cent. are what we call "seeing blind."

These have a certain degree of sight, and do not belong in a school for the blind. If there were no such school, they would probably attend the common schools, and learn what they could.

Then there will be some, not quite blind who might be taught in common schools if special pains were taken with them, and special encouragement given. Let this be given in the shape of books, slates, maps, &c., and even a small weekly stipend, to be paid on certificate of the teacher, that their attendance had been regular. But they should not be admitted as regular pupils of the Institution, especially if they live near by. It will not be necessary to receive, as boarders, more than half of the applicants as pupils. Let those be taken, not as is usually done for five, or seven years, but on probation for six, or twelve months. Then subdivide these into two classes; those who are to remain not more than a year, and those who are to remain as long as may be necessary. Let the first be taught to read letters in raised print; to write a little; to use the slate and other apparatus adapted to the touch; and to become accustomed

to the routine of the instruction and then sent home to attend the common school.

Let them still be considered as beneficiaries of the State, and provided at public expense with books and apparatus, and if they are poor, allowed a small sum weekly toward their support, the balance to be paid by their relatives, or by the town.

After they have been some years in the common schools, some of them will be old enough to go to work, and will find employment; others will desire to return to the Institution, to learn such handicraft as is suitable for them. Keep them about one year and then send them home to work at their trades; and if need be, receive their goods to be sold on their account at the central depot of the Institution.

Then the select pupils, say fifty in number, should have every possible advantage and opportunity for study and improvement. The best masters, the best instruments, and the best opportunities for improvement. They should be kept as long as may be necessary to qualify them to get their own living, as teachers of languages, as vocalists, as tuners of pianos, as organists, and the like.

It should be a general rule, that where children are received as boarders, the parents or friends should be required to pay a small sum, at least equal to what it would actually cost them to board the child at home.

Thus your Institution will best stand that crucial test of excellence among kindred establishments, to wit, giving instruction, aid and assistance to the greatest number of blind persons, while keeping

the least number within its walls, and away from their proper homes.

But those who are to organize your Institution, should have something in view beyond instructing and aiding the blind of this generation. They should strive to bring about a condition of society in future generations which will not only prevent the necessity of removing so many blind children from home for instruction, but lessen the number who shall exist at all. As your hospitals for lunatics should be a focus whence go out light and knowledge to all the people concerning the causes of insanity, and the means of its prevention, so your Institution for the Blind should, by means of its reports, and otherwise, diffuse knowledge concerning the hereditary and other causes of imperfect organs of sight; and of those habits and morbid conditions of life which lead to so much blindness in every generation. It should make widely known the fact that there is in your State a constant number of at least twenty-five hundred persons, wholly or partially blind; that each generation is burdened with this number, not from any inherent and essential condition of the physical man, but from a temporary and remediable one; and that the blindness of so many is phenomenal, not essential; that is, dependent upon the physical condition of the people, which may be varied at human will.

Teach that the average number of blind, dumb, insane, idiotic and other defectives, is a sure test of the average physical condition of the people; that is, of the purity of the human stock;

and that number will be higher or lower according as they obey or violate God's laws. In other words, it is a test of the degree in which they lead religious or sinful lives, "for sin is the transgression of the law." Tried by this test, their lives are sinful; for there are now in this State at least fifteen thousand of the defective class; and at least as many more who inherit from birth such strong animal appetites, and such feeble restraining powers, that they are not free moral agents; that is, they are not, and cannot be, a law unto themselves. These thirty thousand are for the most part, what they are, by reason of organic and inherited physical imperfections; "The fathers ate sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

All these infirm or enfeebled conditions which we deplore, are punishments of transgressions of some law. But although God's punishments can neither be pardoned, nor evaded, they are temporary, not eternal; merciful, not wrathful; prospective, not retrospective in their purpose; remedial, not vengeful in their operation.

It lies therefore with this generation to modify the physical condition, and through that the moral condition of the next, and of the next. Whoever knows this, and feels that he himself can live up to his light—that he can obey the natural laws, "that he can be a law unto himself," has little faith in humanity if he doubts the capacity of the people at large to stand finally where he stands.

The body is declared to be "the temple of the Holy Ghost;" by which I understand, the dwelling,

and the instrument of the soul; and I entreat attention to the importance of having the temple "swept and garnished," and the instrument put into the best possible condition, as a means of attaining to the highest spiritual excellence, by the greatest possible number of people.

I regard every well ascertained natural law as a divine law, the binding force of which would not be increased by thunders from Sinai. New revelations of these laws are continually vouchsafed; and among them that which indicates that our spiritual growth and power depend upon the quality and condition of our physical system; which are greatly variable at human will.

My deep convictions upon this subject, and the earnestness of my purpose, must be my apology (if any be needed,) for plainness of speech and directness of comparison.

Let us suppose, then, that to every generation of horses or cattle in your State, thirty thousand were born infirm, defective, shorn of a sense, or otherwise worthless, think you that your farmers, who can breed horses of any size, shape, or color; who can breed cattle with long horns, short horns, or no horns at all,—think you they would not find of what transgression of law these defects are the punishment, and hasten to obey it? And if people can be moved to do this by the mere love of gain, how much more when moved by that mighty moral force, parental love?

Time will not permit me to enlarge upon this subject. You may regard me as an optimist; but my faith in the elevation and improvement of man's

physical condition, as a step toward his moral elevation, springs from my faith in the love and good will of the Great Father, who breathed into his children a part of his divine spirit, which, from its very essence, must grow brighter and brighter until the perfect day.

May His blessing rest upon the work which you this day begin.

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#### NOTE A.

[Page 42.]

While these sheets were passing through the press, I submitted this paragraph to two persons who are familiar with the facts, and asked whether, in their opinion, it was correct, and ought to be published, or not.

The first replied, "If among faults of organization you include those which give rise almost necessarily to difficulties and mistakes in administration, then it is strictly true; and it ought to be published for the good of the cause."

The second said, "I think you entirely misapprehend the true nature of the cause or necessity which led to the establishment of a second Institution for the Blind." \* \* \*

He did not object to the publication of the paragraph, but I inferred from his language that it would not be agreeable; and as he is officially connected with the old Institution, I should have stricken it out, from respect to him and his fellow-workers, if he had not added, what struck me as portentous words: "The real and true necessity for another Institution was the great number of helpless and harmless blind in the State; and it was owing to the number, condition

and necessities of this class that a new Institution was established; the object being to provide a home or asylum for them."

Such language from a person in his position gives me serious concern; for though I think he is mistaken with regard to certain facts, his words show how strong and prevalent is the common idea, that an asylum or home, is necessary and even desirable, for the helpless and homeless blind.

Against this idea I protest earnestly; not only because it is erroneous; but because it may be harmful. It is sure indeed to disappear when the principles which ought to guide public charity are better understood; but should it, in the meantime, be adopted in the organization of the New York State Institution, my hopes of the true greatness and beneficent influences of that establishment will be blighted in the bud.

S. G. H.

